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ABSTRACT

A naturalistic study examined how the structure of a teacher education course in reading diagnosis promoted an active, constructive stance toward teaching. Two professors in education participated in the study; one was the participant/instructor in the class and the other was a participant/observer. The 20 students in the class attended a seminar followed immediately by a practicum experience tutoring children with reading difficulties. Data included field notes, lecture notes, video and audiotapes of lectures and discussions, in-depth interviews with students, essay exams, and tutoring journals. Results indicated that four patterns encouraged the preservice students to integrate concepts: (1) using multiple perspectives to develop lesson plans; (2) offering the students structure and direction; (3) spending a majority of instructional time on student-led learning; and (4) modeling instructional techniques that illustrated a concept. Findings coalesced into a major theme, that of dealing with complexity which involves recognizing that teaching is a complex interaction where concepts interact and change as they are applied within a situational context. (RS)

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The Teacher/Researcher in Preservice Reading Education

Linda Christensen and Barbara J. Walker

Teacher education classes, often, follow a conventional, lecture-based format where preservice teachers are told what experts know (facts) and then examined on how well they remember these facts. Sometimes preservice teachers are given examples of how experts have solved classroom dilemmas (procedures) but seldom are they asked to solve these dilemmas themselves (Risko, Yount, & Towell, 1991). Such formats tend to inhibit teachers' inquiry into how to solve complex instructional situations while teaching. These preservice teachers are prone to have "textbook" explanations of reading and limited understanding about the integrated use of key concepts when faced with complex instructional situations. Risko, et. al. (p. 89, 1991) report that their preservice students "seemed 1) inflexible when thinking about multiple problems that students may encounter, 2) limited in their application of intervention strategies to novel instructional contexts, and 3) limited in their use of alternate strategies for times when instruction didn't go as expected." Needless to say, these are compelling reasons to reform teacher education courses; however, research of any kind on preservice teacher education (Koehler, 1985) and reading education, in particular (Alverman, 1991), is sparse.

Existing research rarely focuses on the content and delivery of instruction within the teacher education courses (Andrews, 1989). In the midst of this call for reform, college faculty have been helping teachers become researchers in their own classrooms in an attempt to develop the problem-solving attitude in the public schools. However, few college professors have become researchers in their own classrooms as they change their teacher education classes.

The teacher/researcher framework involves teachers looking at their own teaching as a participant-observer. This type of research provides methods and concepts for studying natural behaviors in authentic settings. It provides techniques for research that is ecologically valid by suggesting that it is beneficial for experiemnters to "leave the security of laboratories, tolerate greater ambiguity, and go where people actually live in order to analyze...behavior into components that perhaps then become the basis for development of dependent measures and theories for further experimental study" (Brooks and Baumeister, 1977, p. 415). In this study, two college professors collaborated in a reading diagnosis course to answer questions about the seminar. Several guiding questions were postulated to focus the research: What contexts support critical, thoughtful learning? In particular, what class structure lead students to integrate concepts and what type of activities enable students to integrate concepts? This study, then, focused on

how a teacher education course in reading diagnosis was structured to promote an active, constructive stance to teaching.

Method

A naturalistic approach was selected by the researchers to investigate the guiding questions posed in this study. Two professors in education participated in the study; one was the participant/instructor in the class and the other was a participant /observer in the class. The class was a preservice teacher education course on reading diagnosis and remediation which involved both a seminar followed immediately by a practicum experience with preservice students tutoring children with reading difficulties. There were twenty preservice students enrolled in the fourteen-week course. Data were collected in a variety of ways. First, the instructor kept field notes as well as detailed lecture notes. Each lecture was also video taped: these tapes were transcribed and chronologed for further analysis. The participant/observer took detailed class notes, noting not only course content but preservice students' comments and reactions. Audio tapes were made of student discussions and these tapes were later transcribed. Four students were also interviewed in depth, once during the course of the semester and once shortly following the completion of the course, concerning their perceptions of the seminar and its effect on their teaching. Students' essay exams and tutoring journals

were also scrutinized for relevant statements. Using analytic induction (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) data were unitized, coded and categorized. Triangulation provided validity by cross-checking different data sources and testing perceptions against those of participants (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). In reviewing the data four patterns developed and, from these patterns, a major theme emerged.

Results

Two of the guiding questions of our research formed an organizing structure to look at the patterns of the data. From these patterns an overall theme emerged. These results follow.

What class structures lead preservice students to integrate concepts?

One pattern that emerged that encouraged the preservice students to integrate concepts was using multiple perspectives to develop lesson plans. These theoretical perspectives were presented by the instructor on a continuum ranging from whole language to direct instruction with the interactive model of reading in the middle. This encouraged the preservice teachers to design programs using techniques from various theoretical frameworks.

From the transcripts of the lecture, the course outline, and textbook, it was evident that multiple perspectives to instruction was encouraged as a way to meet

the needs of individual students in the classroom. In the student interviews, the participants mentioned this as an important characteristic in their planning and implementing lessons. They planned lessons using various techniques that promoted students' strengths rather than followed a particular philosophical stance. In the mid-term, final interview, and final exam, students referred to using a variety of approaches to solve instructional problems. Referring to the multiple perspectives, one student commented, "a teacher can implement the best strategy to teach an individual to read. Not all students can work from a top-down approach, nor can all students work from a bottom-up approach. This approach selects elements from both approaches and individualizes the technique to the student." Multiple perspectives were also evident in the diagnostic narratives. Each day the preservice students reflected on what had happened during their teaching. In their reflections, they talked about changes in the text, task, context, and technique that were made to solve problems as they teach. Their ideas about teaching involved adjustments that they could make from various perspectives rather than just executing a prescribed plan.

A second pattern concerning structure emerged that indicated the kind of design that was needed in the course. The students felt like they needed more direction and structure. In trying to understand this pattern, we

reanalyzed the interviews, researcher notes, and the chronolog. Consistently, the data indicated that the students felt they needed more structure. Although the course was not presented as such, many students believed that there was only one right answer from the authority (the professor in this case). One student exemplified this attitude in her interview "The class was frustrating because I was worried about my grade and having all my I's dotted and the theories said just right."

Since the course promoted thinking about multiple perspectives and then deciding which instructional approach to use with a particular student which allowed students to develop their own lesson plans, the preservice students felt like they had no structure. It is ironic that this pattern emerged, since the professor tried very hard to be clear about expectations from the onset of the course. However, the expectation was that diagnosis is dynamic and there are no right answers. Allowing for options made the students feel uncomfortable and ask for more structure.

Thus, students, by definition, want to know what is concretely expected and how a professor will grade this expectation. When the expectation was to be flexible and responsive and then justify the action, students felt like they needed more structure. However, to give the preservice students more structure and a prescribed way to teach, as in the basal reading manual, would be to interpret the pattern

of "felt need for structure" separate from the pattern of multiple perspectives which introduced the notion of complex and personal decision-making in teaching. Students had the misconception that structure was what they needed in order to handle diverse situations. Answering the question: "What structure lead to students integrating concepts" brought to the surface the complexity of teaching reading. In answering the second question, some resolution will be suggested for resolving this dichotomy.

What type of activities lead to preservice students being able to integrate concepts?

From the chronolog, the student interviews, the researcher's observations and the professor's journal, the pattern of student involvement emerged. The chronolog showed that 40% of instructional time was spent on examples and practice exercises where the students had to apply information from the lecture, textbook and teaching. Fourteen percent of the time was spent on a "question and answer" period where the students discussed problems in their teaching. For fifty-four percent of the seminar, the students lead the learning while during forty-six percent of the time, the teacher lead the seminar (housekeeping, 16% and lecture, 30%). During the seminar, which in the past had often been a lecture, more cooperative learning groups were used. The students reported that they were actively constructing their own theory of reading. Commenting on the

group experiences, one student remarked "one person's ideas leads to new ideas. I can make connections between my thoughts and what to do." This focus on student learning seemed to promote integrating concepts rather than a theoretical analysis of a specific reading technique.

From the interviews, the students commented that the question and answer period was the most beneficial activity. One student commented that it allowed us "to relate real problems with real answers." It appears that the activities of the class "put teachers in positions where their reflection and thought about their own work was central to considerations about teaching and learning (Duffy, 1990)." They constructed their own theory of reading with the framework provided in the seminar.

The second pattern that emerged regarding activities that promote integration of concepts was that modeling instructional techniques that illustrated a concept helped the students integrate concepts. During the seminar, the professor modeled how to implement specific instructional techniques. In the professors journal she made this statement about her purpose for modeling. "I was also concerned with the timing of modeling the techniques and which ones are critical for teaching and which ones are not. Which ones illustrated concepts and which ones were less illustrative of concepts." The modeling of the techniques was a way to illustrate major concepts. The students also

suggested that the demonstrations helped them understand and apply the concepts. One student commented "demonstrations are good. They are concrete and visual, but, without the theory to back it up, they are not useful." The professor used concrete experiences of participating in reading lessons to help students formulate conceptual knowledge. During the demonstration exercise, the students could construct a personal understanding of how they would react during a particular type of instruction. Their personal response helped them understand more abstract constructs in the field of remedial reading.

The critical activities involved the students in developing and using their knowledge about reading instruction within the seminar. The preservice students needed to experience the concepts personally before they were able to elaborate abstract concepts. They preferred coming from the personal, subjective stance to textbook knowledge. When students could brainstorm and interact in the group, they developed multi-solutions to problems. Although they used textbook knowledge, it was when they had a question about their teaching. It was their practice that focused their textbook reading. In both the mid-term and final interviews, the students reported relying heavily on the textbook to formulate their instructional decisions when problems in teaching arose. Thus, instruction, even in college, that is grounded in personal experience helps these

students conceptualize the information in the textbook and begin to think on their own.

Conclusion and Major Theme

The patterns of the course can be combined into one major theme, that of dealing with complexity. Teaching is a complex interaction where concepts interact and change as they are applied within a situational context. This knowledge is never quite the same as the theoretical presentation in the textbook. Thus, part of a teacher's development is learning to deal this complexity while at the same time developing their conceptual knowledge which is often emerging rather than well-defined as in the textbook.

As we discussed the patterns of this study, it appeared that what was missing from instruction was demonstrating to the preservice students the complexity and the contradiction of beginning by being well-structured in planning and ending by analyzing the dynamic and responsive nature of teaching. It appeared that teacher educators not only need to demonstrate how to teach reading, but they also need to <u>model</u> their own flexibility of decision-making in complex instructional situations. The pattern of multiple perspectives brought to the surface the complexity of teaching reading but the preservice students still wanted the "right answer" as if there were only one solution to each teaching situation. The notion of complex and personal decision-making in teaching was supported but never

demonstrated by the professor. However, by combining the patterns evident in this study (multiple persceptives, felt need for structure, demonstrating techniques, and high student involvement) a structure of more modeling and subsequent practice in the complexity of decision making emerged as a possible framework for understanding this ill-structured domain that is defined by Spiro, Coulson, Feltovich, & Anderson (1988). The students reported thinking about the professor's model and using the practice exercises as a means to concretely discuss the theories they were learning. After the demonstrations the students would practice techniques with their own students and then come to class with questions. Considering the power of modeling, it appears that to demonstrate the complexity of decision making as well as letting the students discuss this personally would have helped the students accept the ill-structured nature of teaching. In other words, teacher educators need to <u>show</u> students that "teaching by its very nature involves irresolvable contradictions between being organized, well-planned and directive on the one hand and being flexible, responsive and covert on the other (Duffy, 1990)."

Provocative Questions

One of the purposes of a naturalistic study is to raise issues that could lead to further research in the area and to serve as a method for analyzing and reorganizing teacher education classes. In looking at the patterns and theme that

emerged in this study, several provocative questions arose. First, how can we facilitate the use of a multiple perspectives model within the teacher education program? In a field of education that has been dominated by controversy over the "one best way to teach reading," can we begin to work toward an understanding that preservice students need to understand each perspective in order to deal with the complex interactions that occur when they teach? Perhaps, by ourselves using multiple perspectives in the college class we can show students how to use various perspective within an instructional event. Furthermore, this flexibility might cater to the various situations that the preservice students encounter. Second, in addressing the issue of amount of structure in the class, is there a way to model the unstructured contradictory process of pulling from various perspectives and have students then practice this model of teaching in their own practicum experiences? Complex decision-making that occurs in the throws of teaching is a hard concept to teach in the traditional lecture format. Currently the case study method, video-disc cases, and hypercard technology are ways being used to provide opportunities for preservice students to engage in the contraditory process of pulling from various perspectives. However, this leads to a further concern, that it is difficult to have students model this process when they are worrried about grades, about the "correct" model, and about

the professor's evaluation. Yet teacher educators feel they need to retain some evaluative process and some means of quality control. Perhaps a combination of varied assessments including traditional measures, portfolios, self-reflection and self-assessment need to be incorporated to fit in with the philosophical perspective we are proposing.

Finally, in dealing with a population of students in teacher education which is traditionally female, is there a way of approaching the dynamic and unstructured way of selecting techniques which fits the women's special way of knowing and learning? Women, more than men, are caught in the attitude of recieved knowing, "a perspective from which women concieve of themselves as capable of receiving, even preproducing, knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities but not capable of creating knowledge on their own" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1986). It appears that the activities that encouraged personal, subjective knowing were beneficial to these students. Are there ways to lead these women from this personal, subjective stance to a critical and integrated stance which involves making continual connections between personal experiences and abstract knowledge? Perhaps experiences that ask students to discuss their personal learning and development are more in line with women's ways of knowing.

Taking a closer look at one's teaching through this naturalistic study has led to both a restructuring of aspects

of our instruction as well as provided questions for further research and study. In fact, the process of researching one's own teaching highlights the reflective process that we, college professors, want preservice teachers to use. This research process intensified the professors reflective thinking about student learning. As the researchers studied the seminar, their focus shifted from the order of activities to when are the students engaged in actively constructing knowledge and how did they get there. In fact, we found that college teaching was a complex decision-making process where we needed to use multiple perspectives about learning and teaching in order to develop our courses.

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